

REMARKS

Claims 3, 4, 6-21 and 23-24 are pending in the application.

Claim Amendments

By this amendment, claim 5 is cancelled and the limitations thereof added to claim 23. An editorial revision is made in claim 18. Claim 23 is further amended to clarify that separate control means are provided for NOx and SOx catalyst regeneration, support for which resides at page 23, lines 11-19 of the specification. Claims 23 and 24 are amended to state that NOx release occurs at a temperature outside the temperature range where SOx is releasable. No new matter is added by this amendment.

Rejection under 35 USC 112 (paragraph one)

Claims 3-21, 23 and 24 stand rejected under 35 USC 112 (paragraph one) as failing to comply with the enablement requirement. This rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

It is the Examiner's position that applicants' specification lacks support for independent control of NOx and SOx release. In response, applicants note that separate and independent NOx and SOx release is taught at page 23, lines 11-19 of the specification. It is accordingly applicants' intent that a separate NOx removal step

occur prior to the SOx removal step. Even if some NOx is released together with the SOx during the SOx removal step, that does not negate the fact that applicants provide for a separate NOx removal step and a separate SOx removal step.

The rejection is thus without basis and should be withdrawn.

Rejection of Claims 10-15, 17 and 23 over Murachi

Claims 10-15, 17 and 23 stand rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as being anticipated by Murachi et al '989.

In support of the rejection, the Examiner takes the position that Murachi et al teaches an exhaust gas purifying apparatus of an internal combustion engine comprised of (a) a light-off catalyst 5 provided in an exhaust passage, (b) exhaust gas purifying means 9 provided in the exhaust passage downstream of the light-off catalyst, (c) control means 20,4 for repeatedly releasing NOx adsorbed by the NOx catalyst every first interval (2 minutes) and repeatedly releasing SOx adsorbed by the NOx catalyst every second interval (every 60 minutes) independent from and longer than the first interval.

This rejection is respectfully traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

In response, the limitations of claim 5 (which claim is not included with the rejected claims) are incorporated into independent claim 23. Claim 23 (and those claims dependent thereon) are accordingly *not anticipated* by Murachi et al.

More specifically, Murachi et al fails to teach or suggest the limitation where the oxygen storage capability of the light-off catalyst is less than the oxygen storage capability of the three-way catalyst per one-liter volume of each catalyst as set forth in applicants' amended claim 23.

The limitation in claim 23 wherein the light-off catalyst "has limited O₂ storage capability such that the light-off catalyst passes therethrough at least CO in an exhaust gas to a downstream side of the light-off catalyst when the internal combustion engine is operating under a condition where the oxygen concentration of the exhaust gas is reduced" is also, contrary to the assertion of the Examiner, not taught by Murachi et al. Indeed, the Examiner's reliance upon the disclosure of Murachi et al (line 66 of column 3 to line 8 of column 4, and lines 29 to 38 of column 6) on this point is misplaced.

As is well known, a three-way catalyst exhibits acceptable exhaust gas purifying performance when the air-fuel ratio is close to the stoichiometric ratio, and it is further well known that the exhaust gas purifying performance deteriorates when the air-fuel

ratio is lean or rich. Namely, as is set forth at page 3, lines 8 to 25 of the specification, it is possible to feed HC and CO, which have not been purified by the light-off catalyst, downstream of the light-off catalyst by making the air-fuel ratio rich without reducing the oxygen storage capability. Murachi et al operates in a manner consistent with the prior art as disclosed at page 3, lines 8-25 of the specification. As a result, the Examiner's view that Murachi et al discloses that the presence of HC or CO in the exhaust gas downstream of the light-off catalyst reduces the oxygen storage capability per one-liter volume of the light-off catalyst is not correct, and based on an assumption without factual basis.

Accordingly, Murachi et al neither discloses nor suggests the reduction of the oxygen storage capability per one-liter volume of the light-off catalyst.

Applicants acknowledge that Murachi et al teaches that a NOx release control is performed every first interval (2 minutes), and that a SOx release control is performed every second interval (60 minutes). The NOx release control and Sox release control are accordingly not performed independently of each other. Further, the Examiner states that, since in Murachi et al it is possible to release NOx even when the SOx release control is not taking place, the SOx release control and NOx release control in Murachi et al

are independent from each other. The Examiner's position on this point is also without basis.

The expression "control is performed independently" in claim 23 means that a SOx release control is performed even under those conditions where NOx release control cannot be performed - in other words, wherein the instruction to perform a SOx release control and the instruction to perform a NOx release control are independent from each other.

Admittedly, in Murachi et al, when NOx release control and DPF regeneration control coincide, SOx release control is performed during the period when such actions coincide. The system is configured so that SOx release is automatically performed when both the command for NOx release and the command for SOx release are given. Indeed, there exists no teaching in Murachi et al regarding the use of control means to conduct SOx release control in the first place.

Thus, to perform SOx release, according to the teachings of Murachi et al, it is essential that NOx release also be performed, with SOx release being impossible unless NOx release is also performed at the same time.

Accordingly, since, in Murachi et al, NOx release is essential for the execution of SOx release, it is not correct to consider that SOx release control and NOx release control are carried out

independently from each other. This means that Murachi et al neither describes nor suggests the execution of NOx release control *independent from* SOx release control as claimed by applicants.

In view of the above, the rejection is without basis and should be withdrawn.

Rejection of Claims 3 and 4 over Murachi et al

Claims 3 and 4 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Murachi et al in view of design choice. This rejection respectfully is traversed.

The Examiner acknowledges that Murachi et al fails to suggest the limitation where the difference in the amount of oxygen adsorbed on the light-off catalyst is not greater than 150 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst, and the amount of oxygen stored in the light-off catalyst is not greater than 25 g per one-liter volume of the catalyst. However, the Examiner takes the position that one of ordinary skill in the art could arrive at the claimed embodiment as it "would be a function of many variables such as the size of the light-off catalyst, engine size, engine operating conditions (load, speed, etc.), air and fuel properties, capacity and size of a main catalyst, etc." The Examiner also states that there is nothing in the specification which establishes that these claimed amounts of oxygen bring about unexpected results.

However, as is clearly set forth in Fig. 10 of the specification, with the amount of oxygen adsorbed on the light-off catalyst being 150 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst and the amount of oxygen component stored in the light-off catalyst being 25 g per one-liter volume of the catalyst, the time required for making the air-fuel ratio rich can be reduced as much as by 60% compared with the period obtained by a catalyst whose adsorbed amount of oxygen exceeds 300 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst. This showing confirms that the claimed embodiment is in fact not a matter of routine experimentation or optimization as asserted by the Examiner.

The rejection is thus without basis and should be withdrawn.

Rejection of Claims 5, 16 and 18-21 over Murachi et al

Claims 5, 16 and 18-21 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Murachi et al. This rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

In response, claim 5 is cancelled and the limitations thereof inserted into independent claim 23. Claim 18 is also amended to clarify that the reduced oxygen storage capability is per one liter volume of the catalyst.

With respect to the rejection of claim 18, the Examiner acknowledges that the apparatus of Murachi et al fails to disclose the fact that the exhaust gas purifying means (9) has an oxygen storage capacity greater than that of the light-off catalyst (5). The Examiner further states that it is easy for those with ordinary skill in the art to reduce the oxygen storage capability of a light-off catalyst (5) that is of small size with respect to the exhaust gas purifying means (9). Applicants believe the conclusion of the Examiner to be without basis.

It is a matter of course that, when a catalyst is small, the oxygen storage capability for the entire volume of the catalyst becomes small as long as the oxygen storing material composition is the same. It should be noted, however, that what is discussed in the invention of the present application is the oxygen storage capability *per one-liter volume of the catalyst*, and thus what is compared is not simply the amount of the oxygen component stored in the light-off catalyst (5) and that in the exhaust gas purifying means (9). In other words, even if the amount of the oxygen component stored in the light-off catalyst (5) is less than that in the exhaust gas purifying means (9), the oxygen storage capability of the light-off catalyst (5) can be higher than that of the exhaust gas purifying means (9). Hence, the conclusion of the Examiner used in support of the rejection is ill-founded.

The rejection is thus without basis and should be withdrawn.

Rejection of Claims 6 and 7 over Murachi et al

Claims 6 and 7 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Murachi et al in view of design choice. This rejection respectfully is traversed.

The Examiner acknowledges that Murachi et al does not teach that an amount of oxygen absorbed on the three-way catalyst of the exhaust gas purifying means is not greater than about 150 cc per one liter volume of the catalyst, and that an oxygen component stored in the three-way catalyst is not greater than 25 g per one-liter volume of the catalyst.

However, the Examiner takes the position that one of ordinary skill in the art could arrive at the claimed embodiment as it "would be a function of many variables such as the size of the light-off catalyst, engine size, engine operating conditions (load, speed, etc.), air and fuel properties, capacity and size of a main catalyst, etc." The Examiner also states that there is nothing in the specification which establishes that these claimed amounts of oxygen bring about unexpected results.

However, as is clearly set forth in Fig. 10 of the specification, with the amount of oxygen adsorbed on the light-off catalyst being 150 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst and the

amount of oxygen component stored in the light-off catalyst being 25 g per one-liter volume of the catalyst, the time required for making the air-fuel ratio rich can be reduced as much as by 60% compared with the period obtained by a catalyst whose adsorbed amount of oxygen exceeds 300 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst. This showing confirms that the claimed embodiment is in fact not a matter of routine experimentation or optimization as asserted by the Examiner.

The rejection is thus without basis and should be withdrawn.

Rejection of Claims 8-9 over Murachi

Claims 8-9 stand rejected under 35 USC 103 as being unpatentable over Murachi et al. This rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

Though the Examiner recognizes that Murachi et al does not disclose the spark ignition type four-cycle engine set forth in claim 8, the Examiner states that "both 'spark-ignition engine' and 'diesel engine' generate exhaust gases containing the same harmful emissions". The Examiner accordingly takes the position that it would have been obvious to one having ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to apply the invention of Murachi et al to a spark ignition type engine as claimed.

In response, applicants disagree with the position of the Examiner. Certainly, the exhaust gas composition is similar for the diesel engine and the spark-ignition engine. However, one of the main differences between the two types lies in the fact that, while in the case of diesel engine soot is present, in the case of spark-ignition engine substantially no soot is present. Thus, while the diesel engine essentially requires a filter such as DPF, etc. for capturing soot, such a filter is not required for the spark-ignition engine and is accordingly not employed.

In the invention of Murachi et al, SOx release control is performed when the DPF regeneration control and the NOx release control coincide. But if the invention of the present invention relates to a spark-ignition engine, the DPF regeneration control is not present. In other words, according to the technique disclosed by Murachi et al, the SOx release control cannot be performed in the case of a spark-ignition engine whereas it can be performed by the invention of the present application.

With regard to claim 9, rhw Examiner states that "re claim 9, in the apparatus of Murachi et al, a fuel injection engine which injects fuel vapor directly into the cylinder is stipulated". However, claim 9 of the invention of the present application is dependent on claim 8 which is directed to the use of a gasoline engine. As discussed hereinabove, claim 8 of the invention of the

present application cannot be easily arrived at from the teachings of Murachi et al, and claim 9, which is dependent on claim 8, is also distinguishable over the reference.

In view of the above, the rejection is without basis and should be withdrawn.

Rejection of Claim 24 over Murachi in view of Hepburn

Claim 24 stands rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Murachi et al in view of Hepburn. This rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

The Examiner takes the view that claim 24 can be easily derived in view of the combined teachings of Murachi et al and Hepburn. Hepburn teaches that SOx control is conducted after the NOx release control.

However, as the additionally-cited Hepburn patent fails to cure the deficiencies of Murachi et al with respect to the limitations of independent claim 23, the rejection is without basis and should be withdrawn.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, withdrawal of all rejections and allowance of the application is earnestly solicited.

Should there be any outstanding matters that need to be resolved in the present application, the Examiner is respectfully

Appl. No. 09/188,190

requested to contact James W. Hellwege (Reg. No. 28,808) at the telephone number of the undersigned below.


If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

BIRCH, STEWART, KOLASCH & BIRCH, LLP

BY 

Terrell C. Birch, #19,382


TCB:JWH/sh
1472-0177P

P.O. Box 747
Falls Church, VA 22040-0747
(703) 205-8000